



Connecticut Working Families Party
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ct-workingfamilies.org

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March 25, 2013

Testimony in OPPOSITION to SB1146 AAC Cross-Endorsements from Sal Luciano, Executive Director of AFSCME Council 4, and Co-Chair of the Connecticut Working Families Party

To Senator Musto, Representative Jutila, Senator McLaughlan, Representative Hwang and the members of the Government Administration and Elections Committee

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this legislation today. The Working Families Party is an independent, grassroots political party that formed in 2002 to fight for economic justice for working- and middle-class families. We have found that while we often share priorities with politicians from the two major parties, having our own party is the best way we have to advance our agenda and connect with all our members on politics.

Our party has representation from all five congressional districts and eleven organizations, and communicates with tens of thousands of voters every year about elections and issues. Since our formation, voter turnout was highest in Connecticut in 2008, when we received almost 84,000 statewide. The combined membership of our affiliated organizations is 110,000 working and retired men and women.

Working Families Party fully opposes SB1146 for banning cross-endorsement, limiting the meaningful participation of third parties in our democracy, and dialing back voter choice.

Cross-endorsement allows multiple parties to nominate the same candidate. Although it provides this opportunity to all parties, minor parties tend to practice it more often. It permits minor parties to nominate an independent member for office when that suits their agenda, and to nominate a Democrat, Republican or other party's candidate if they believe that that candidate best represents them in that election.

Cross-endorsement helps our democracy flourish and should be protected:

Cross endorsement gives voters more choices and more information on the ballot. When a candidate appears twice on the ballot, that indicates something to voters. Voters understand that parties stand for a particular set of values and that a nomination means something. For example, when the Working Families Party nominates a Democrat or a Republican, that conveys that the candidate is good on issues that affect working people.

This is, in large part, because of the issue advocacy our organization does. Because we have spoken with many voters about our campaigns for issues like paid sick days or an increase in the minimum wage, our endorsement is associated with those issues. The Working Families Party endorsement is also a strong signal to our union members about who is the right candidate to support.

Cross-endorsement gives a voice to voters who don't fit into one of the two major parties. Without cross-endorsement, the choices for minor parties are very limited, but voters are still interested in minor parties. In many elections, 5 or even 10 percent of voters choose a minor party instead of the Democrats or Republicans. Surveys show that 50% percent of Americans have cast a vote for a minor party at least once. That's a lot of votes to "waste" on unelectable candidates.

Without cross-endorsement, the Working Families would frequently face the dilemma of running our own candidate and indirectly contributing to the election of a candidate who is farthest from our views, or remaining out of the race and being unable to promote our agenda. Either way is an unacceptable exclusion of our values from the political process. We should not be forced to choose between abandoning our values and hurting our agenda. It is essential to protect voters' ability to be independent without being destructive, and it would be un-democratic to make it harder for independent voices to be heard.

Cross endorsement increases turnout. First, polling shows that the people who are least likely to vote are most interested in minor parties. That includes young people, low-income voters and immigrants. Minor parties can serve to turn out those new voters. Second, robust studies also find cross-endorsement decreases down-ballot drop off by providing meaningful information to voters on the ballot.

We have found that the tools of cross-endorsement and the Working Families Party have been very effective at engaging our members in the political process, especially those who are turned off by the two-party system and the brands of the two major parties. This legislation is a solution to a problem that doesn't exist, and it's passage would only push more voters out of our electoral system.

Please pass on SB1146. It is un-democratic and unnecessarily restrictive. Thank you.